

[Jacob Bennett]

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Phipps, Woody[.] Rangelore Tarrant Co., Dist., 7

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Jacob Bennett, 79, was born on his father's plantation, near [Bremond?], Tex., Nov. 4, 1858. Following the Civil War, his father converted the plantation into a stock farm. John Bennett, an ex-slave who bore the name of Jacob's father, his former master, taught Jacob to ride at an early age. He was employed as a cowboy by Carrol Powell when he was 14. He quit the Powell Ranch when he was 16 and was employed on the Curry Ranch 'til he was 21, when he returned to his home and took the management of his father's stock farm, where he still resides. His story:

Why, I still live right on the place where I first learned to ride hosses and punch cows. You bet! Right on the very place I was born. You see, the place was my dad's. He had the place in an old time plantation when I has born on Nov. 4. 1858, but made a stock farm out of it right after the war was over and his niggers freed. I don't recollect just how many miles 'twas out from Bremond, but very few of our niggers quit when they were freed and went into Bremond. Very few.

"In fact, there was one of them, John Bennett, who was named for my father, stayed right with us 'til he died a little over three years ago, and he was some over 90 years old when he died. John was a right able cow puncher, and could ride hosses, wild ones, to a fare

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ye well. Many's the time I've seen him ride them 400 and 500 yards 'till they pitched plum down, like an old clock. They pitched and pitched 'til they didn't have any pitch left in them.

'John was the one that taught me to ride hosses, and ag'in my dad's orders, too. Dad was afraid I'd get killed trying to ride them ornery critters we used to have to ride. You've probably heard somebody say how mean they were and all. C [-?] 12 [?] [?] [Texas?] 2 They were nothing cut old Mustangs with a little Spanish blood in them, and they'd pitch every time they'd have as much as six hours rest. Well, John'd get out there and manage to leave the hoss corral after dad left. He'd then get me and teach me how to ride. You know, I never did tell that, and dad never knowed just how 'twas I learned to ride. He thought I just naturally picked it up by getting on one and riding it off.

"While the plantation wasn't changed 'til after the war, dad still had a lot of hosses on the place to do the plantation work, and a few cows for milkers and so on. We raised enough that we could also kill one now and then for beef when we needed beef. Now these hosses we had on the place were the ones John learnt me to ride, and the first hoss ever I rode, without any help from anybody, was an old carriage hoss, when I was about seven I reckon.

Anyway, I was interested in riding them along about when I was in to deviling dad to let me learn to ride along about when I was eight. He never give in 'til one day when I come out to where he was watching a bunch of field hands clean out a patch, and when he looked up I was right at him and had rode the hoss all the way from home, about a mile I reckon, he said, 'How's it come you're riding one of my hosses?' I made some kind of an answer, and he told me to get for home and he'd 'tend to me proper when he got home.

"Instead, when he got home, he didn't 'tend to me as he said, but told me to have John teach me to ride hosses. I said I would, and he left me alone. When I got to John and told him we sure had a good laugh together about it all, because he's already taught me to ride. Well, I rode hosses around there and worked cattle, 'til 3 my mother died when I was

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10. Dad then decided that I ought to go some place and get an education, [so?] he [buys?] me a hoss if I'll promise to study hard and make good grades. I promised, and he bought me a yaller hoss that was a dandy. I called him 'Puny'. because he was so yaller. After dad had one of his niggers put his 'B9' brand on the hoss, off we went to [Hillsboro?], where I was to live with an uncle.

"Well, sir, do you know that we weren't in Hillsboro but two weeks 'til that ornery rascal run off? That's what he done, and I happened to be lucky enough that dad came into town a couple of days later, so's I could tell him. You see, dad was quite a character. He could trail anything to beat the [band?], and was what they call a 'frontiersman', in [that?] he went several places before anybody else. He went to fight in the Texas war for Independence from Mexico, and was on the San Jacinto battlegrounds a few minutes after [the?] fight was all over. Him and 20 others from/ around Bremond were there at the same time, and they were sure disappointed that the fun was all over before they could get there. That's all I know about it, and most of that I learnt from people that were dad'd friends. My dad didn't trail anything that he could possibly get out of.

"Dad trailed Puny down into [Limestone?] county, and to a man's ranch by the name of Bateman. Bateman run the same iron that dad did, the 'B9'. He told [?] dad that he'd caught this hoss up and used him because he wore the same iron that he used on his ranch there, and sent him North with a trail drive that went to Kansas City. 4 "Now Puny'd been a funny sort of a hoss. Nigger John'd busted him for me, but had never used anything but a kid's hull on him because the hoss was meant for me, and me alone. That away, John figured he was doing best by me, and he was for sure, because what I'm going to tell now will prove it. Dad says, 'I know the hoss belongs to my son, and I'll tell you how we will be able to identify it'. You see, Bateman didn't want to give the hoss up because he was a good one for sure. 'Now, this hoss is gentle, But every time a man mounts him, he pitches to beat the band'.

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"Bateman says, 'He's your hoss because that's him, only you'll have to wait about three months for him because he went on that trail drive. Such's my trail boss brings him in, I'll send him up to you.

"Just about time for school to start again in the Fall, why here come on of Bateman's hands with Puny, and I sure was glad to see him again. The hand's been up the trail and told me that nobody ever rode Puny, and the trail boss'd sold him in Kansas city if he'd have thought Bateman wouldn't have minded.

"[?] the finish [of?] the school term the next year, dad let me go back to the stock farm and I worked like any other hand 'til I was 14. My insisting that dad let me handle the stock and do all the hoss riding that was necessary around the place, I got to where I was a pretty fair cowpuncher, and had picked up a smattering of cow sense along with it. By cow sense, I mean that I learnt to handle cows and [?] them when anything went wrong with them. You see, in that day and time, only the farms were fenced. The range was as free of fence as a stampeding herd is of sense. 5 "Where you have barb wire fences, your critters'll run up against the wire where you have the tall grass we used to have/ all over the range, and cut places on their legs and sides. At times, they'd cut a muscle and there wasn't but one thing you could do when they did, and that was to kill the critter. Just to show you how really tall the grass used to grow in olden times, Puny was about 14 hands, and when I rode him, the grass'd turn the rowels on my boots. When a critter laid down in them days, it was lost from sight and you'd have a hard time finding it 'til you run across the very spot it was laying.

"When I got to be 14, I was in town and was aiming to leave for home when I heard some cowpunchers saying that Carrol Powell was in town looking for cowpunchers. I got to thinking, then, that I'd like to work on a real ranch. You see, Powell run from 4,000 to 5,000 head of stockers in his 'CP' iron, and run a lot of extra hosses, too. He had a pretty big home ranch along in connection with his cattle, I rode on home and asked dad about it and, instead of the argument I expected, he said 'It's about time you got a little experience

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in working for the other man because this might not last forever, and then you'd be worse off than if you never had a bit of training because you'd have nothing to fall back on'.

“That fixed me up fine and I didn't even go back to town, but cut out across the country to the 'CP' spread. I got there about the time Powell did, and he hadn't been [able?] to get a hand in town, so he took me right on, providing I was able to deliver the goods. I delivered them, and got me a steady job at \$14.00 a month and chuck. Before I was 15, he'd raised me to \$20.00 6 a month and chuck. And I was about as able a man he had on the spread, I reckon. As able anyway at anything except busting the wild hosses the had on his hoss ranch, and regular cowpunchers wasn't supposed to be able to do that. Now I don't mean that we could get away with sloppy work. Far from that. In fact, Carrol Powell didn't hire a man that wasn't a top hand, because he was awful particular about his cow critters. What I mean is, I wasn't able to train hosses [to?] cut and peg. We were furnished hosses that, in lots of cases, knowed more about cow work than some of the fellows in the saddle. That sounds sort of stretched, but all we had to do was to show a cutting hoss a certain critter we wanted cut out of the herd, and that hoss would get after that critter like it was some sort of a game and stay with the critter till the hoss run it plum out of the herd. The way we showed the hoss what we wanted was by hitting it with a rope, our lasso.

“Not only cut the critter out of the herd, but when you make your cast with your lasso, that hoss knowed just the right second when to sit down to keep the critter from dragging the hoss, and, if the hoss sat down too soon, there'd be so much slack in the rope the critter'd have leverage to pull with. Then, if the hoss sat down a little late, it'd be just in the [set?] of going down and'd have the least resistance it'd have at any time. You see, that's the reason the cowpunchers loved their hosses so much when they had one that was a good one. When he had a good hoss, his work was so much easier that it just made all the difference in the world.

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"I never used Puny to work with, but just rode him when I went to town, home, or galling it around. You know, they done that 7 in the olden days, too, even if there wasn't half enough women to go around.

"I saw my first real stampede on the CP spread. We'd rounded up a herd of three-year-olds, and intended driving them into headquarters for culling for feed lots when a rain come up. I reckon 'twas along about dark when this happened. Anyway, there came up one of these real black clouds Texas is capable of, and rain come down in sheets, a regular cloudburst. The herd got awful skittish and was moving around, when all of a sudden here come a clap of thunder that tried our ear drums. Following the clap come a number of thunder claps, sort of like rolling a bass drum. You know, like a snare drummer can roll his drum. Well, that herd hit out for the tail and [uncut?] like a bullet from a gun. They ran like the very devil hisself was prodding them along.

"Instead of trying to work the herd, we fellows were really trying to keep ourselves dry when that happened and we should have been on our toes. Of course, it goes without saying that Carrol Powell never learnt what we'd done. We just told him the herd stampeded, which it probably would have done anyway, because there's no stopping a herd when it makes up its mind to run.

"The night was so dark that one of us had to walk to trail the herd. We took turn about trailing 'til morning and we were dog-tired then, but had to do it to find out where the cattle'd gone. By the time we got to where the herd stopped running, they'd all scattered all over creation, and we spent three days rounding it up again. We worked 'til high noon before men from headquarters reached us with food. The only thing we'd had was coffee, which any 8 zany carries in his saddlepockets. Coffee and jerk, that's standard for anybody that ever rode the range, if there's any range experience to them. Jerk is dried beef, venison, or any kind of meat that's been dried good and hard. You can take it and boil it

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with a little seasoning and make a pretty good soup, but the waddies in our part of the country just chewed it when they got hungry. It gave a fair flavor that away, too.

“Now there's not much else I recall about the CP spread, except my buddy, 'Pal' Rogers. We all called him Pal, but his last name was Rogers. The main reason I buddied up with him, I reckon, was because he was such a good range hand. He could sure ride, rope, and shoot with the best I ever saw. He could sure do it all. If it hadn't have been for his drinking, I'm sure he could have made a name for hisself, but he just drank so much nobody'd ever give him a chance.

“I once saw Pal riding herd to [turn?] a steer, and a snake rose up in his path. Well, his hoss went to pitching, and Pal stayed right with it, drewed his iron and shot that snake's head right off without [sothering?] the rest of his body. I've told this before and people'd say that it was an accident, but I believe he shot that snake right were he wanted to shoot. I believe it because he was capable of shooting wherever he made up his mind to shoot. I've seen him shout many a target while riding by on his hoss. And, I've seen him ride many a wild hoss, but Powell wouldn't let him [?] work with his wild hoss stock because he was always afraid he'd show up drunk one time and get killed by one of them ornery rascals. That's just about what'd happened, too. 9 “After I was 16 years old, along about in the dead of winter after most of the range work had been laid by and all we had to do was hunt [motherless?] calves and the rest of the little work, I quit the CP and went over to the 'TC' spread, owned and ran by Tom Curry. Curry's outfit was just about the same size as Powell's, running about the same number of hosses and cows. He also run his spread in the same manner, hiring nothing but top hands. If it hadn't have been that the men were all different from the ones on the CP, I couldn't have been on the same spread.

“About a month after I was hired an the TC, they started the Spring roundup. About a month later, all the ranchers'd rounded up all the cattle on that range and had them on the holding grounds, when the freakiest accident ever I saw happened. During any roundup, all the men work at top speed to get the cattle all cut out and the work over

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before something happens to stampede the herd, and separate it all out again. You see, all the ranchers round up every head on the range; then, when they get all the cattle together, they cut out what belongs to each other, then they can do what they please with their own cattle.

“Well, during the cutting out, a big old steer quit the herd and went to running off. Two cowpunchers who happened to be off a ways from the steer, and in different directions, rode in as fast as they could ride, trying to cut the steer off and drive it back to the herd. Well, not paying no attention to each other but keeping their minds on the steer, they ran together and both fell off. One of them broke his neck in the fall, and the other fell 10 under the other man's hoss, which stepped in his face and kicked his head half loose. That was the gruesomest sight ever I expect to see, the faces they had. Even when I stop to think about it, it gives me that cold shudders and I have to think of something else.

“Now, during the Fall roundup that same year, a cowpuncher working for the TC spread fell from his hoss and his foot caught in the saddle. He'd have been kicked to death if it hadn't have been for a many from the UT Connected, who caught his hoss and held its head up close to keep it in a strain and from kicking.

“There was another stampede I saw while on the TC, and it was sort of a freaky one. After a hard rain, the cattle'd all been standing up and it looked like we were going to ride it out without them critters stomping, but a fellow rode up on his hoss and got down to talk to another of the boys that had built a small fire to make a little coffee. Well, he had one of them fancy saddles with conchas all around it, and his saddle rattled. An old steer snorted right loud; another took it up, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the whole herd was on the stomp, running just as hard as it could go with a deep draw right in front of them about two miles away.

“Well, you know a herd can run for 20 miles. Not likely to, but they've been known to run that far, and lots farther. We knowed if the herd ever reached this draw, they'd plunge on

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over and most of the herd would be crushed to death, or kicked to death by those who fell in on top. There was only one thing to do, and that was to out run the herd and mill it. 11 "I was one of those closest to the side of the herd that took the lead in the stomp, and so I was able to get in on the play before they got so awful far. They'd run about three-quarters of a mile, I reckon, when me and another follow cut in to reach the leaders. There were two of them, but one was gradually drawing back and another taking the lead when I reached him. This other fellow's hoss stumbled, and they fell right in the path of the side steers, but the front ones side-stepped him. That I saw, but no more. Well, there wasn't anything for me to do but keep on trying to mill the herd, so I kept on. We hadn't gone much more than a mile and a half from the bedding ground when I got the lead steer into a turn, and pretty soon got the whole herd to milling. They run and they run 'til finally one of them bawled, another bawled, and they soon stopped running and went to grazing. I rode back as soon's I saw I was going to get help, to see what'd [happened?] to the zany that'd fell.

"He himself told me that his hoss broke his neck in the fall, and that he'd jumped up by the hoss's back. The lead steer had jumped the hoss and him too, and the rest of them all the way back to the rear had followed the jump, and he was there to tell the tale. He lived to here about seven years ago, when he died right there in Bremond.

"Oh, that range life's mighty exciting at times. Especially in the olden days when we had Mustangs to ride, and longhorns to brand. I'd a heap druther live that life than the one I'm living right now. The 'Old Rocking Chair's' got me now. Got me, for sure. All I'm doing now is managing the same old place where I was born. It belongs to me and my sister's heirs, but I run it myself.